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THE MOVEMENT FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE NEGRO IN PHILADELPHIA

BY JOHN T. EMLÉN.

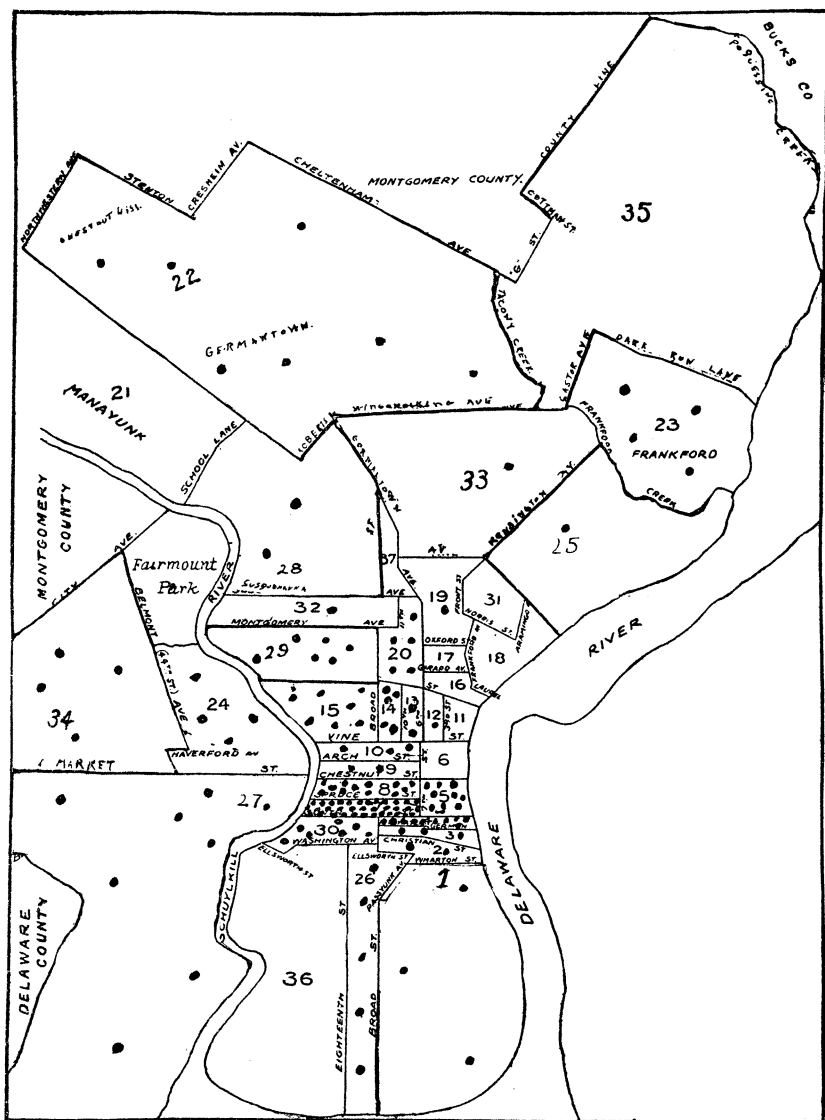
Secretary and Treasurer of the Armstrong Association of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia has a Negro population according to the 1910 census of 84,459. Four other cities in the United States have larger Negro populations: Washington, 94,446; New York, including Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, Richmond and Brooklyn, 91,709; New Orleans, 89,262; and Baltimore, 84,749. No other cities in the United States have Negro populations at all approaching these in numbers.

At the present rate of increase, New York will probably in the next ten years be the leading Negro city, and Philadelphia, second. This may be seen by the fact that in the past ten years New York increased about 31,000; Philadelphia, about 22,000; Washington, about 12,000; New Orleans, about 11,500; and Baltimore, about 5,500.

The accompanying maps indicating the distribution of the total population and of the Negro population by wards show how the Negroes are spread over the city. Map A on page 82 shows by wards the distribution of the total population in 1910, each dot indicating a population of 5,000 persons. The chief business section of the city centers about Market and Chestnut Streets, and between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, so that this district shows less congestion of dwellings than those immediately surrounding it on both sides. In the surrounding districts or wards, the population is the thickest, but it is fairly evenly distributed, becoming, however, less concentrated in the outlying and suburban wards. Map B on page 83 shows the Negro population of Philadelphia, in 1890, each dot indicating 250 persons. Map C, on page 86 shows similarly the Negro population of 1910. In noting the map of 1890,¹

¹ These maps give the population accurately by wards, but of course as they do not show the relative distribution of population in different parts of the ward, the results in a few wards are a trifle misleading. For example, in the 26th and 36th wards, the greater part of the Negro population is toward the northern ends.



MAP B.—DISTRIBUTION BY WARDS OF NEGRO POPULATION OF PHILADELPHIA, 1890

One dot to every 250 Negroes. No Tabulation for Wards 35, 36, and 37

one sees the largest concentration of the Negro population in the 7th ward, and the next largest in the 4th, 5th, 8th and 30th, which are adjoining.

In 1910, the Negro population has, to some extent, shifted and spread. In the central 5th and 8th wards, it is very much smaller than in 1890, and, while the 7th is larger by about 2,700, it has not increased in proportion to the increase in some other parts of the city. The 30th ward, to the southwest of the 7th, has increased over five-fold, and further to the south, in the 26th and 36th wards, and to the west in various parts of West Philadelphia, and to the north in the 14th, 15th, 20th, 47th and 32d, and in Germantown, the increase has been very great. The Negro population, therefore, has a very large concentrated nucleus, but has increasingly spread in large numbers over two-thirds of the city.

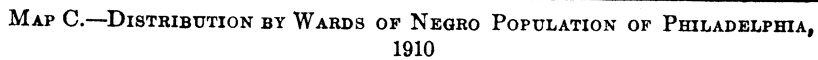
In studying the bettering of conditions among such a population, one must inquire about the greatest needs and the practical opportunities for meeting them. There should be sufficient opportunities for religious and educational instruction, for recreation, for the amelioration and improvement of social and of economic conditions, and for the improvement of conditions of health and of housing.

Scattered through the wards to meet the religious needs of this population are about 105 churches of about 12 different denominations, mostly Baptist, or of some form of Methodist Episcopal. These churches are, apart from their function as centers of religious inspiration, centers for social entertainment and intercourse to a much larger extent than are the churches of the white people, yet very few of them are able at the present time to meet the needs of the population in some of the educational and recreational ways in which social centers should meet them. Accordingly, social centers in various sections have grown up. These with playgrounds in the city are indicated in Map D on page 87.

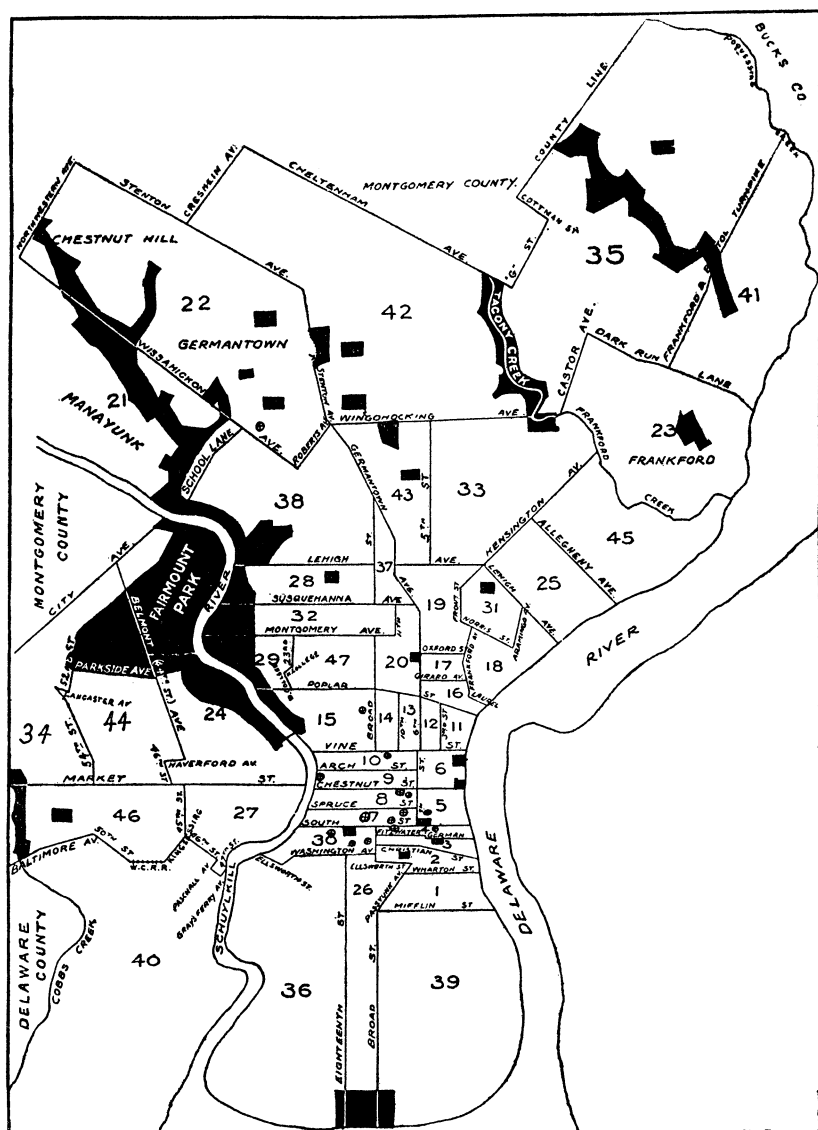
Two playgrounds are available for the thickly populated center of the 7th and 30th wards—one on the extreme lower edge of the colored population and one which is well located for the 30th, and the upper part of the 7th. Unfortunately, the latter will probably soon be abolished and the ground used for other purposes, and if no other ground is secured, this will be a serious loss to the community. A ground is also especially needed in the neighborhood of the 40th and 27th wards.

A number of the social centers are at the present time doing very good work, but as a group they are in number and equipment very inadequate to meet the present needs. The things that are needed throughout the city to make the proper recreational facilities are playgrounds and the increased use of the school yards and buildings. On account of the great financial difficulties in securing sufficient money for social centers, adequate provisions can usually be made only at the schools. It will, however, be of no special value to have these unless, when they are opened, they can have the proper supervision. The use of such facilities with good sympathetic supervision is one of the greatest needs of the colored people at the present time. The Thomas Durham school building, in the 7th ward, is becoming an increasingly valuable social center of the kind needed. There are now, as may be seen on the map, a number of centers in the central section, noteworthy among which will be the Y. M. C. A., with its new \$100,000 building, and the Y. W. C. A., with its new plant.

Some of the institutions and agencies for relief and for social betterment are for both white and colored and some for colored only. In some organizations purporting to work "without distinction of color" it is very difficult to get attention for a colored case. On the whole, however, in most lines a fair proportion of colored cases receive attention. Some of the activities and opportunities of such institutions and agencies may be briefly summarized. The day nurseries receiving colored children are fairly adequate for the different sections where there are large colored populations, except in the neighborhood of the 47th and 20th wards, where one is much needed. Four of them are in or near the central section where there is the largest population, one in West Philadelphia, and one in Germantown. Most of the hospitals receive colored cases in large numbers, and in two hospitals courses are given for the training of colored nurses. Lying-in charities afford shelter and protection. One agency meets colored immigrants from the South at the wharves, and affords them needed protection. Dependent children are provided for through a number of institutions in many of which there is coöperation, the cases being distributed through the children's bureau. Many of these institutions have a long history and between them furnish quite as good facilities as are afforded to white children.



One dot to every 250 Negroes



MAP D—Playgrounds, including Parks used as Playgrounds and Social Centers, Available to Negroes, 1913

⊙ Indicates a Social Center

The report of the committee on municipal charities² says that ten institutions care for both white and colored, with a capacity of 2,567, and ten for colored children only, with a capacity of 567. It is sometimes necessary to send more children to these institutions than would normally be sent, because of the extreme difficulty in finding proper kinds of homes in the country near Philadelphia in which to place them. In spite of thorough and continual investigation by the Children's Aid Society, the number of such homes seems to be very small in proportion to the need. Provisions additional to those made by the municipality for the aged and infirm are furnished by one institution, with accommodations for 140, and by one small home. The state reformatories are for both white and colored. In addition to the facilities by the municipality, two private institutions for the blind, two for the deaf, and two for the feeble-minded and epileptic admit Negroes. The number of Negroes about one year ago in these institutions, according to investigation, were, respectively, 10, 21 and 31. General agencies for charity organization, children's aid, protection of children from cruelty, etc., and other agencies of outdoor relief, should be and are run under general organizations for both races.

Negroes have much more difficulty in securing good houses in good neighborhoods than members of the other races have. Various building and loan associations have helped them much to overcome this handicap. Under the Housing Commission of Philadelphia, several committees of colored people have, from time to time, been organized to care for the needs of their own communities, but very little interest has been shown by the committees and not much has been done. Through such committees the colored people could, with entire protection to themselves, rid many communities of filth, bad drainage, and overcrowding, and could much improve health conditions. Most of the agencies for the improvement of health—namely, hospitals with their social service departments, dispensaries, anti-tuberculosis society, etc.—give their interest and attention to colored and white.

Economic opportunities for the majority of Negroes are limited. They can work in but few trades, though one may find in census reports that there are Negroes in almost all kinds of work that do

²Report of Sub-Committee on "Dependent Children" in the *Report of the Committee on Municipal Charities*, 1913.

not require large capital. The figures in such reports do not always reveal real conditions. If one hundred carpenters, for example, are recorded, so many of these are unskilled that the figures do not represent real conditions, and seem to show a larger number of workmen in this occupation than actually exists. The women are restricted chiefly to domestic service, and though this restriction is unfortunate and resented by them, they do quite as well economically as white girls of similar efficiency and training. To men, however, the restrictions are more serious. Unskilled Negro men through faults partly their own, and partly those of the other race, are limited in the kinds of work open to them, and the Negro boys are restricted in the kinds to which through skill and training they may rise.

Vocational training, and training in the qualities of character necessary to success, are needed. Ample facilities for academic training but not for vocational are available. Courses at the University of Pennsylvania are open to those desiring to enter. Good courses may be obtained by a limited number in private institutions in dressmaking, sewing and cooking. Several private schools give trade courses, and at the Philadelphia Trade School several courses are open, but in training in trade and business courses and in the lines of work in which the majority enter, there are not, and can not be, sufficient facilities except through the public school system. Public schools are the means through which, not only the educational, but, to a large extent, the economic needs must be met.

The historical development of the agencies and institutions, some of them dating from long before the time of emancipation, may be sketched briefly. As early as 1770, a school house was built by members of the Society of Friends for the education of the colored people, and a number of such educational institutions were established, from time to time, but gradually the public school system has come to fill the function for which these pioneers planned. Two institutions for dependent colored children, started in 1822 and 1855, are still existent and perform an important work for dependent children. In more recent times other institutions for dependent children have been established. In 1864, a home for aged and infirm colored persons was founded. A trade school started in 1837 was, in 1902, made a normal school for academic and industrial training of Negro teachers. The majority of these institutions founded fifty

years ago, or more, are supported by endowment, and the control of the management is, to a large extent, in the hands of members of the white race. Many of them are very well conducted and are an invaluable help in meeting the present needs. Most of the organizations treating chiefly colored cases, however, have started within the past twenty years. They include hospitals, schools, homes, social centers, etc. In some of these, the institutions in both their work and oversight are carried on largely by colored people. Some are supported by voluntary contributions, but some receive a considerable amount of their support from state appropriations.

In any large city there should be an organization to work in a general practical way for the interest of the colored people, supplementing at any time the community needs which are not being met by the other institutions. This the Armstrong Association of Philadelphia has for five years increasingly endeavored to do in Philadelphia.

Several general activities for such an organization are obvious: (1) A bureau of record of various institutions both within and outside of the city, to help the various agencies in the treatment of individual cases. (2) An occasional investigation in a field in which improvement seems possible. (3) Education of the white members of the community to make them feel a sympathy with and responsibility to the other race. (4) Education of the colored members of the community to make them feel a practical interest in the progress of their people. (5) Practical work in fields needing temporarily special attention.

A large amount of data relative to a bureau of record has been obtained and a bureau partially completed. Three careful investigations have been made and printed. Literature is sent annually to over 10,000 white persons in Philadelphia. Much of this is merely in circular form but it gains the attention of many who otherwise would not hear of the Negro problem from a sympathetic point of view. In this, of course, work somewhat similar is done by others. Lectures have been held in schools and churches. Recently the meetings at which these lectures have been held have been well attended. At each of the recent meetings an expert has given an address on a special phase of social work.

In addition to the above, the Armstrong Association has given a great deal of attention and effort to two subjects of especial impor-

tance at the present time: First, the economic situation, which a worker of the charity organization reports is the greatest handicap of the colored people; second, the public schools as an agency for help.

To aid in solving the difficulty of the economic situation, the Armstrong Association established an office with a department for employment which has grown steadily. The chief purpose of the employment work is: (1) To help skilled Negroes to get work, and (2) to help Negroes into new kinds of work. During the past year it has helped in securing five hundred jobs and placements for colored men and women. These placements were made through the office at which opportunities were looked up, references secured, and often investigations made of how the work was done. This five hundred does not, however, represent the actual number assisted, because a number of men who were helped to get work several years ago, have since then dealt directly with their customers without the necessity of using the Armstrong Association as an intermediary, and have consequently each year obtained positions which are not credited to us. Our purpose among mechanics has been to increase the number of workers and to help those who are already working. Three associations among the mechanics were formed, covering different branches, and two others have affiliated with us, namely—the stationary engineers and the portable engineers. Among the stationary engineers there has been considerable appreciation of the importance of continued organization, but among the others the advantages of mutual coöperation do not seem to be yet appreciated. Mechanics have been helped by us in the drawing of contracts and specifications and, sometimes, in their accounts, with the result that one man increased his work from a very small amount to about \$7,000, in one year, and in the next year to about \$25,000. The progress of the men has been handicapped through their lack of capital and through their inability to secure loans at reasonable rates of interest. But such loans would be of little value without training on their part in being able to handle the financial side of large operations. A remedial loan association would, however, be of great value to them. The association was instrumental in helping more than a hundred shirt waist workers to secure places in shirt waist factories. Different individuals among these changed so frequently from year to year that any organization among them to

increase their numbers and efficiency proved to be impossible. Over a hundred track workers for the Pennsylvania Railroad were found places, and thus introduced into a kind of work which was new to them in the neighborhood of Philadelphia.

The association is planning to continue to increase the industrial possibilities among the men by further study of openings, and by following up individual cases to see in each case whether the difficulty is prejudice, improper supervision, or inefficiency, and whether this difficulty can be remedied.

To help the public schools experimentally, the Armstrong Association employs a trained worker in two important school centers, under the direction of the principals. The worker gives her whole time to the two schools where the largest number of colored children attend. Through her there has been established a point of contact between the home and the school, and by visits in the homes and studies of the needs and possibilities of each individual child, by meetings of parents, by treatment of special cases, and by vocational guidance the parent and the child both become more interested in the school and the child is helped. A social center is promised in one of these schools which already has an evening school, and in the other it is hoped that an evening school will soon be established. In both it seems as if progress is being made and new possibilities shown. In the actual handling of the work, Negro social workers are usually the best, and they will be of increasing importance. Nothing can be more important at the present time than the thorough training and guidance of such workers, who with proper oversight, increasing from time to time, will make their work more efficient. Through such workers there should be an improvement in general in the conditions among the colored people.

The work just outlined of an organization for the systematic study and betterment of conditions of Negroes living in cities, is comparatively new, starting five years ago, but we are convinced that it has done good and that such work has possibilities for good. Similar work is being undertaken in New York and several other cities, and will be increasingly recognized as an important part of the program of social work of an American city.